Estillac Plantation Records, 1665-1813
(bulk 1752-1783): Finding Aid

Summary Information

Call number: C1586
Repository: Princeton University Library. Special Collections.
Manuscripts Division
One Washington Road Princeton, New Jersey 08544 USA
Size: 0.2 linear feet
1 box
Language(s) of Material: French
Abstract: Consists of over sixty letters and related documents concerning the Estillac sugar plantation in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now the Republic of Haiti) from the late 1750s through the early 1780s. Many of the letters are addressed to A. Mabille, a Paris-based hatter, trustee, and creditor, and pertain to the operations and troubled finances of the plantation under the management of Guillaume Claude Besson and Jean Guillaume Robillard.
Location: This collection is stored onsite at Firestone Library.
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A. Mabille was a Parisian hatter and fur merchant who invested in the Estillac sugar plantation in the French colony of Saint-Domingue on the portion of the island of Hispaniola (Taino: Haiti) that is now the Republic of Haiti. Also known as "Le Bonnet au Grand Boucan," the Estillac plantation was located in Plaine-du-Nord, near Cap-Français (now Cap-Haïtien). Guillaume d'Aubarède, Marquis d'Aubarède (1717-1795) and his brother Jean Anthelme d'Aubarède (1722-1794) acquired a stake in the property in 1756-1757 from Jean Joseph de Marans, comte d'Estillac and Marie Elisabeth Allaire du Langot as an investment to develop the land into a sugarcane plantation. The operation was already in financial trouble by 1759 and was entrusted to Guillaume Claude Besson. Despite Besson's attempts to turn a profit by converting some of the land from sugar production to coffee and cocoa production, the plantation was soon virtually bankrupt and was liquidated to several creditors, headed by A. Mabille as the main trustee. The management of the Estillac plantation then passed into the hands of another creditor, Jean Guillaume Robillard (d. 1793), of the Robillards, a family of French settlers who were already well-established on the island.

Description

Consists of business correspondence and documents concerning the Estillac plantation (also known as "Le Bonnet au Grand Boucan") in the French colony of Saint-Domingue, which is now the Republic of Haiti. Materials largely pertain to the operations and troubled finances of the plantation from the late 1750s through the early 1780s under the management of Guillaume Claude Besson, and later, Jean Guillaume Robillard. Many of the letters are addressed from various creditors and persons responsible for maintaining the Estillac plantation to Monsieur A. Mabille, a Paris-based hatter, trustee, and creditor. In total, there are over sixty letters, as well as several financial and genealogical documents related to the property and the families who managed it.

The correspondence primarily deals with various agricultural issues, particularly land acquisition and sugar production, the slave trade, financial difficulties, and problems with creditors. After Guillaume d'Aubarède, Marquis d'Aubarède (1717-1795) acquired a stake in the property from the Estillac family, Guillaume Claude Besson managed the plantation's operations. The collection includes letters to Mabille from the Marquis d'Aubarède, as well as a number of letters from Besson, who reports on the many difficulties he encountered, including partial abandonment of fields, dealing with creditors and settlers, the strenuousness of the labor, and diseases decimating enslaved laborers on the plantation. Besson's letters also present proposals for addressing the problems facing the plantation, such as his plan to abandon sugarcane production in favor of coffee and cocoa.

The Estillac plantation later passed into the hands of the Robillard family, whose letters describe the precise state of the property, sugar mills, and enslaved laborers as the family found them when they took over the management of the plantation. In particular, these letters relate the terrible physical condition of 155 enslaved laborers who were suffering from a tropical skin disease called "yaws," as well as the Robillards' plans to seek monetary damages and reimbursement for their care. The collection also contains letters from Lory, Plombard, and Compagnie, French traders based in Cap-Français (Cap-Haïtien), who warn against investment in the plantation crops of Saint-Domingue, and advise speculation, instead, in the slave trade.
Additionally, there are letters from or mentioning individuals belonging to the families of Rohault, Bertrand de Laroque, De Ste. Marie, Gauthier, La Baron, Angot, Estillac, Mauny, De Survarenne, De la Borderie, and Guerin, as well as a genealogical table of the Robillard family. Some letters also mention war news and other current events, including the arrival of the squadron of Charles Henri, comte d'Estaing (1729-1794) in 1764.

Arrangement

Arranged chronologically.

Access and Use

Access
Open for research.

Restrictions on Use and Copyright Information
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Acquisition and Appraisal

Provenance and Acquisition

Appraisal
No materials were separated during 2017 processing.

Processing and Other Information

Works Cited
Sources consulted in the creation of this finding aid include:

Encoding
Descriptive Rules Used
Finding aid content adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard.

Subject Headings

· Aubarede, William Claude, Marquis d'
· Mabille, A.
· Robillard family
· Colonists -- Haiti -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Plantation owners -- Haiti -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Slaveholders -- West Indies, French -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Slavery -- West Indies, French -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
· Sugar plantations -- Haiti -- History -- 18th century -- Sources.
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· Correspondence -- 18th century.
· Financial records -- 18th century.
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- Correspondence and Documents, 1769-1772
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- Correspondence and Documents, 1782-1783
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Robillard Family Genealogical Table, 1792-1813

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